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Sarah J. Aftab  
A Mixed-Method Study Examining the  
Intersection of Race and Sexual  
Violence Among LGBTQ Prisoners

## **ABSTRACT**

The current mixed-method study examined the intersection of race and sexual violence among LGBTQ prisoners while incarcerated. The study used secondary data from a survey of LGBTQ prisoners collected by an organization in 2014 ( $N=1093$ ). Historically, the criminal justice system has criminalized and discriminated against LGBTQ persons, and reports show a prevalence of abuse occurs during incarceration. Quantitatively, the study aimed to determine a relationship between race and sexual violence; qualitatively, it aimed to understand how prisoners in this study experienced sexual violence. Findings suggested: Black, Latinx/Hispanic, and Mixed race prisoners had significantly lower likelihood of unwanted touching from another prisoner; and Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Mixed, and Other race prisoners had significantly lower likelihood of sexual assault from another prisoner. Themes found within the qualitative data were the presence of differences in race, affect, and complexity when prisoners experienced sexual violence from another prisoner, in contrast to a staff person.

**A MIXED-METHOD STUDY EXAMINING THE INTERSECTION OF  
RACE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AMONG LGBTQ PRISONERS**

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Sarah J. Aftab

Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2017

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

This study examines experiences of violence during incarceration in adults who identify as LGBTQ. There few American peer-reviewed empirical studies found on this population and topic specifically. This mixed-method study determines the risk of LGBTQ prisoner populations experiencing sexual violence by other prisoners and staff based on racial identity and explores how these prisoners experience this violence. Through these analyses, this paper examines experiences of sexual violence in racial groups within LGBTQ prisoners. A purpose of this study is to give voices to LGBTQ prisoners who have experienced this violence, to understand their experiences, and to spread awareness of their victimization.

### **Overview of the Literature**

Studies on experiences of incarceration are sparse in general, but some exist on heterosexual populations (i.e. Freitas, Inácio, & Saavedra, 2016; Morash, Jeong, Bohmert, & Bush, 2012; Smoyer, 2016; Wooldredge, 1999). Some studies exist on risk to the prison industrial complex (PIC) and certain LGBTQ populations (discussed below), but not on LGBTQ adults specifically. There are also studies on the experiences of trans women specifically in prisons (discussed below). Yet, it is known that LGBTQ adults are discriminated against (i.e. Mays & Cochran, 2001; Nadal, Whitman, Davis, Erazo, & Davidoff, 2016; Sutter & Perrin, 2016) and experience violence (Badenes-Ribera, Frias-Navarro, Bonilla-Campos, Pons-Salvador, & Monterde-i-Bort, 2015; Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990; Herek & Berrill, 1992; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012) outside of prison. Discrimination and violence

against LGBTQ prisoners are documented in some non-peer reviewed reports published by non-profit organizations, which will be discussed. Race and sexual violence are most frequently studied through examining the aggressor of the violence (i.e. Berg & DeLisi, 2006; Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Huebner, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Sorensen & Davis, 2011; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2015) and many studies have found that African American prisoners have a higher likelihood of carrying out violent acts. Other studies focusing on the victimization of prisoners and race have found that African American prisoners experience less sexual and physical victimization than white prisoners (Cunningham, Sorensen, Vigen, & Woods, 2010; Wolff, Jing, & Blitz, 2008; Wooldredge, & Steiner, 2012).

In this paper the term PIC refers to the systems of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, courts, jails, and prisons as answers to economic, social and political problems (Criminal Resistance, n.d.). Incarceration refers to being held inside of the walls of a prison, jail, correctional center or detention center. In the present study, prisoner refers to someone who is incarcerated, being held in a prison or jail. LGBTQ is an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning. Although gender identity and sexuality are larger than these categories, the acronym is used in the current study to represent all who identify as this, as well as gender non-conforming, homosexual, asexual, two-spirit, intersex, and other identities that are not heterosexual or cis-gendered (identifying as the gender assigned to one at birth) (Lydon, Karrington, Low, Miller, & Yazdy, 2015). In general, violence refers to any harm, physical or emotional, experienced by the respondent; including discrimination, strip searches, verbal harassment, unwanted touching, physical assault, cavity searches, and sexual assault.



## **Overview of the Methodology**

This mixed-method study is a secondary data analysis of data collected from an organization named Black and Pink, which does outreach and advocacy work for LGBTQ prisoners. Black and Pink conducted a national survey of over 1,000 LGBTQ prisoners in 2014. This researcher limited analysis to quantitative data regarding racial identity and prisoner experiences of sexual violence from prison staff and other prisoners. In addition, the researcher analyzed qualitative data regarding sexual violence. This paper aims to answer quantitatively, *what is the relationship between racial identity and sexual violence among prisoners in the Black and Pink study?* Qualitatively, *how do prisoners in this study experience sexual violence?*

## **Interest in the Study**

The author of this paper is largely motivated to study this topic and population due to the lack of awareness and recognized research of their suffering. The prison system causes many to experience pain, and prison perpetuates a system of oppression, especially for those who hold marginalized identities. Due to the fact that prisoners are seen as a vulnerable population, their experiences and pain are rarely researched and brought to light. This author believes that it is important for social workers and other academics to be aware of these experiences. As a queer, white woman, the researcher wants to support other queer people who are suffering. This author also acknowledges her privileged identities in the context of analyzing this data. The researcher is motivated to study this topic because they believe it is important to give voices to the voiceless, the prisoners that are invisible to the free world. The researcher is motivated to study and support LGBTQ prisoners and encourage academia to be mindful of the system of suffering that controls their daily life. The author is an activist and organizer for the organization, Black and Pink.

## **Benefits for Social Work Field**

This study is important to inform social work education, policy and practice. When informing social policy, preparing to practice social work, and when practicing, it is imperative that social workers incorporate social justice and understand the experiences of all disenfranchised populations. Social workers must always be attentive and conscious of the experiences of marginalized identities, including those who identify as LGBTQ. As there is a large gap in the literature, it is necessary to learn more about LGBTQ experiences while incarcerated in order to fully comprehend the criminal justice system and its effects, and the lived experiences of all LGBTQ people. Further, experiences of sexual violence in prison are likely to impact a prisoner's mental health both while incarcerated and after re-entry to the community (Basham, 2011). Social workers who practice with both prisoners and formerly incarcerated clients should be aware of the experiences they are subjected to and how this may intersect with their identities both in and out of prison. These experiences must inform social workers when they are learning social work, writing and supporting policy, and practicing in the field. Due to the lack of research on LGBTQ prisoners, this study proposes to expand the knowledge base of experiences of incarceration for marginalized populations.

## **Conclusion**

The current chapter introduced the study's premise and population, and the research questions investigated in the study. This mixed-method study used secondary data from LGBTQ prisoners to determine the relationship between racial identity and experiences of sexual violence while incarcerated, and second, to present how different racial groups experienced this violence. In the remainder of the paper, the current literature on these topics and specifics of the study's

methodology will be expanded upon. The results of the study and implications of the findings will be discussed.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

The current study focuses on LGBTQ prisoners' experiences of sexual violence in relation to their racial identity. The following chapter will discuss the theoretical background of this study, including the minority stress model and trauma theory. Current research on LGBTQ populations and their risk to the criminal justice system, the prevalence of traumatic experiences during incarceration, and the relationship between race and violence in prison will be summarized. The theories and existing research give context and rationale for the current study, examining race and experiences of sexual violence for LGBTQ prisoners.

America's state of mass incarceration is evidenced by the rapid growth of prison populations. In the late 1960s, almost 200,000 prisoners were incarcerated, which rose to 600,000 in the 1990s (Davis, 2003). As of 2013, it was estimated that there were over 1.5 million people incarcerated in American prisons (Glaze & Kaeble, 2014). In 2014 there were also 109,100 females incarcerated in the United States, a significant increase from 2007 (Minton & Zeng, 2015). The ascent of mass incarceration in America demonstrates the necessity for research pertaining to prisoners' experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

While aiming to explore LGBTQ experiences of violence while incarcerated, the minority stress model is used to conceptualize the risk of LGBTQ prisoners experiencing stressful events, in particular, violence (Meyer, 2003, 1995). This theory posits that through social processes of stigmatization, homophobia/heterosexism, and transphobia, sexual and

gender minorities (those who identify as LGBTQ) are prone to victimization and experiences of discrimination and violence, which negatively affect their mental health (Meyer, 2003, 1995). From this view, these experiences of violence are specific to their gender or sexual orientation (Meyer, 2003, 1995). Along with this risk to discrimination and violence, LGBTQ people hold an experience of inconsistency between their values and needs, and society's system of functioning. Further, this theory is used to explain why LGBTQ peoples' experiences are not prioritized, leading them to experience negative mental health outcomes. While this theory may be seen as broad (i.e., could be applied to any minority group), and specifically focuses on the effects of this stress, the minority stress model provides a helpful context in which to understand the vulnerability of LGBTQ populations and their risk to violent experiences.

Trauma theory is seen as an additional appropriate framework for the study. Trauma theory posits that one may experience trauma through experiences that threaten the "integrity of the psychological self" (Basham, 2011, p. 443). The effects of surviving a traumatic event can leave one feeling no sense of control, isolated, powerless, and meaningless. Trauma theory differentiates between the traumatic event and the response to the traumatic event. The event itself threatens one's being and induces terror and helplessness. A traumatic event may be a single catastrophic occurrence such as a physical assault, or it may be a repeated pattern of abuse. Based on this foundation, physical and sexual assaults experienced while incarcerated are considered traumatic events. The trauma response includes one's neurobiological effects from the trauma, and the physiological and emotional distress. Further, trauma is known to have lasting, at times detrimental, effects on one's mental health and may linger long after direct experience with trauma has ceased (Basham, 2011). This theory has limitations because it includes a large spectrum of what trauma is; trauma can be experienced in a multitude of

different contexts and one's response to the trauma can vary. However, this lens provides a crucial framework for understanding how all experiences of trauma affect people and their experience of the world and themselves. It will provide an imperative grounding to analyzing the findings of the study and how they may inform social work that serves incarcerated and formerly incarcerated LGBTQ populations.

### **Criminalization of LGBTQ People**

The need for research on the LGBTQ prison population arises due to the disproportionate incarceration of queer people and because of their experiences of discrimination and violence in prisons, which are mainly documented in non-peer-reviewed reports. There is a long history of criminalization of the LGBTQ population dating back to colonial times because of their identity or being suspected of being LGBTQ in and of itself. The laws that have criminalized queer expression have been used selectively, mostly in cases to reinforce gender and racial disparities. At times queer criminal archetypes were also employed to incite more media and public uproar (Mogul, Ritchie, & Witlock, 2012). Amnesty International's (2005) report on police brutality documented the systemic discrimination that LGBTQ populations experience in relation to non-LGBTQ people. The report also found that transgender people, especially low-income trans people of color, are most likely to experience targeting by police and police brutality. The Center for American Progress (2016) reported evidence that judges and other legal staff are biased in regards to risk assessment based on sexual orientation and race. They also found discrimination in jury selection based on sexual orientation, gender identity and race.

A recently published survey conducted of LGBTQ prisoners (Lydon et al., 2015) also shows the clear link between queerness, poverty, and incarceration. Over a third of respondents reported being unemployed prior to their incarceration, nearly seven times the national

unemployment rate in 2014. People were forced into criminalized economies; 39% of respondents reported that they had traded sex for survival, and over half of respondents had sold drugs for money. This point is further illustrated with the high percentage of respondents who reported experiencing homelessness or transience prior to incarceration.

The comprehensive report of the Center for American Progress (2016) echoed the findings already mentioned and also addressed the additional barriers LGBTQ people face upon release. Re-entry programs and probation and parole officers lacked knowledge about LGBTQ issues, such as how to assist people in getting correct identification necessary to obtain employment. There were also cases when parole officers considered dressing in accordance with one's gender identity a violation of parole. Civil commitment, in which prisoners were not released when their sentences were over, disproportionately affected LGBTQ people because many LGBTQ prisoners were convicted of sex-related crimes and/or were disproportionately and oppressively diagnosed with a psychiatric diagnosis. This was related to the misuse of sex offender registries and laws that also affected LGBTQ people.

Studies on youth show a significant link between non-heterosexual youth and a high risk for both school and criminal justice punishment compared to heterosexual youth. A longitudinal study showed that non-heterosexual adolescents had an increased risk for school expulsion, police stops, juvenile arrest, juvenile conviction, and adult conviction (Himmelstein & Brückner, 2011). A qualitative study found that LGBQ youth were punished for exhibiting public affection, disrupting gender norms, fighting to protect themselves from bullies, and experienced a harsh school environment and were blamed for their victimization (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015).

## **Discrimination and Abuse in Prison**

Peer-reviewed studies on LGBTQ people and abuse during incarceration are rare. Some studies on discrimination and violence while incarcerated are centered on youth, not distinguishing their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many studies that exist have taken place in countries other than America. In one of them, almost all participants had experienced some type of abuse (physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, denial of food, and/or excessive stays in solitary confinement) during incarceration (Dierkhising, Lane, & Natsuaki, 2014). A study in Israel showed that inmates reported more staff abuse than the staff members did, and these disproportions were largest in the closed facilities (Davidson-Arad, 2005).

In Lydon et al.'s (2015) survey, many prisoners reported that they were denied care that they sought related to their gender identities. For example, 44% of transgender, non-binary gender, and two-spirit respondents reported being denied access to hormones they requested, and only 21% of respondents were allowed access to underwear and cosmetic needs that matched their gender. Thirty-one percent reported being denied a diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder or Gender Dysphoria upon seeking them during incarceration. In addition, 15% of respondents have been barred from programs offered by the prison because they identified as LGBTQ. Participants of color were more likely to be in solitary confinement when they answered the survey. Participants of color were also less likely than white participants to be put in solitary confinement for the sake of their safety.

The experiences of violence that LGBTQ people face in prison is further chronicled in the Bassichis and Spade's (2007) report on transgender people in men's prisons. They found that people were placed in prisons based on their birth sex, and many transgender women were placed in men's prisons. To attempt to avoid violence, some prisoners sought or were placed in



protective custody, which may be safer in some prisons. However, this move also isolates prisoners and can put them at higher risk of violence from correctional officers. The interviews conducted indicated that placement in prisons based on biological sex determined at birth is extremely dangerous for gender nonconforming, transgender, or intersex prisoners. In addition, they found that punishment from correctional officers could be directly due to gender identity and race. Lastly, their data showed that many interviewees experienced violence from correctional officers, from sexual assault/rape, to unwanted touching and strip searches, and harsher punishments.

According to a National Inmate Survey in 2012, 11.9% of non-heterosexual male and 9.4% of non-heterosexual female prisoners reported sexual victimization by other prisoners and 6.1% of non-heterosexual male and 3% of non-heterosexual female prisoners reported sexual victimization by staff. In the same survey 1% and 3.6% of heterosexual males and females, respectively, reported sexual victimization by other inmates, and 2% and 1.4% of heterosexual males and females reported sexual victimization by staff, respectively. Both male and female non-heterosexual experiences of sexual victimization were statistically significant increases over heterosexual inmates' experiences (Beck, Berzofsky, Caspar, & Krebs, 2014). From 2011 to 2012, 39.9% of transgender inmates reported sexual victimization in state and federal prisons and 26.8% in local jails. In local jails, 15.8% of transgender inmates reported sexual victimization from other inmates and 18.3% reported it from staff in local jails (Beck, 2014).

In a study of previously incarcerated women, almost half reported victimization while incarcerated (Reisner, Bailey, & Sevelius, 2014). In a national transgender survey in 2011, 6% reported physical assault by police officers and 2% reported sexual assault because they were trans or non-conforming. Twenty percent of respondents reported denial of equal service by

police. Thirty-seven percent of those who had been incarcerated reported harassment by correctional officers. American Indians, Latino/a and Black respondents reported the highest rates of harassment from other prisoners. American Indians, Latino/a and Asian respondents reported the highest rates of harassment from staff. Staff physically assaulted 8% of all respondents and sexually assaulted 6% (Grant, Mottet, & Tanis, 2011).

The survey conducted by Lydon et al. (2015) demonstrated a clear link between risk of incarceration and LGBTQ people, but their report specifically documents experiences of discrimination and sexual violence as well. LGBTQ prisoners experience higher rates of physical and sexual violence than the general prison population. Respondents to their survey were over six times more likely to be sexually assaulted than the general prison population. Seventy-six percent of those who reported being sexually assaulted by another prisoner also reported that prison staff intentionally placed them in situations where they would be at high risk of sexual assault from another prisoner. In addition, notwithstanding the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), which aims to create increased safety for prisoners, nearly 100% of prisoners surveyed had experienced some form of sexual violence by prison staff. The vast majority of respondents experienced discrimination and verbal harassment by prison staff members, and staff physically assaulted more than one third. Ninety-eight percent of respondents reported strip searches, 70% reported discrimination, 70% reported verbal harassment, 35% reported physical assault, 37% reported unwanted touching, 12% reported sexual assault/rape, 15% reported promises for sexual favors, all in relation to prison staff (Lydon et al., 2015).

A qualitative study with incarcerated trans women showed that in solitary confinement, most participants reported being laughed at/called names, over half reported being physically hurt on purpose, and slightly less than half reported unwanted touching. Of the trans women in

the general prison population, all reported being laughed at/called names, most reported unwanted touching, and over half reported being physically hurt on purpose. Participants in both general population and solitary reported that they were raped/sexually assaulted, sold for sex, subjected to humiliating strip searches in front of other inmates, verbally and sexually harassed, and received unfair or unprovoked disciplinary charges. All participants reported being sexually harassed, and 16 reported having been subjected to a forced sexual situation in prison due to their gender identity (Rosenberg & Oswin, 2015).

### **Intersection of Violence and Race**

Most commonly, race and violence in prison have been studied by investigating the race of the prisoner carrying out the violence, rather than race of the victim. Some of these studies have found increased rates of assaults among Native Americans and Hispanic prisoners (Berg & DeLisi, 2006; Griffin & Hepburn, 2006). Other studies have found a correlation with Black prisoners and violent acts (Huebner, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Sorensen & Davis, 2011; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2015). Studies that have examined prisoner victimization and race have largely found that Black prisoners are less likely to report sexual and physical victimization than white prisoners (Beck et al., 2014; Cunningham et al., 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Wolff et al., 2008; Wooldredge, & Steiner, 2012). The National Inmate Survey found that prisoners of multiple races (two or more) were most likely to report sexual victimization from both other prisoners and staff. Prisoners of multiple races and white prisoners reported significantly more sexual victimization than black prisoners (Beck et al., 2014).

There are few peer-reviewed studies on LGBTQ prisoners, race and victimization in prison. In addition, studies on youth and discrimination in prison mentioned earlier did not examine and analyze in regards to race. However, some studies exist specifically on trans women

of different races. One report found that Black and Latinx trans and gender nonconforming prisoners reported victimization by correctional officers due to their race (Bassichis & Spade, 2007). The national transgender inmate survey found that Native Americans, Latinx, and Black respondents had the greatest rates of experiencing physical and sexual assault by prison staff and other prisoners compared to the other racial groups (Grant et al., 2011). One study found that Black, Latina, and mixed race trans women were more likely to report experiences of victimization while incarcerated (Reisner et al., 2014).

## **Summary**

A limitation to the results discussed above is that some are not published in peer-reviewed journals. In addition, it is unknown whether some of the interviews and surveys conducted had the approval of an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB may not have given approval due to prisoners being a vulnerable population, and not having this approval or peer-reviewers may delegitimize the results to researchers. Sample sizes of the studies and reports vary largely. Beck et al.'s (2014) quantitative study had the largest sample size of over 90,000 including all identities. Some surveys had around 1,000 up to 6,000 (Grant et al., 2011; Lydon et al., 2015). Some had far smaller samples (less than 25) of qualitative data gathered through interviews and letters (Bassichis & Spade, 2007; Reisner et al., 2014). Overall, a strength of these reports is that they fill in the gap that is seen in the peer-reviewed literature, and the focus of the research is on a population that is rarely studied. The reports also provide a rich, wide range of quantitative and qualitative data that establishes a foundation for future studies. While all studies have their flaws that have been discussed, most of the research is recent and offers a necessary background on the experiences of LGBTQ/non-heterosexual youth and trans women, as well as experiences of discrimination and abuse by staff.

The studies discussed are helpful to provide a base for the current study, particularly to establish what is known in the field, and saliently, how little is known. These heavily documented instances of discrimination and violence against LGBTQ prisoners in non-profit published reports are barely visible in peer-reviewed literature. It is a barrier to the mentioned reports that they are not published in peer-reviewed journals, which may deem their results less scholarly and, therefore, less respected. As noted in this chapter, there are also no peer-reviewed studies specifically focused on race and violence of LGBTQ adults who are or have been incarcerated.

Based on the sum of presented research on LGBTQ prisoners, violence, and race, the current study aimed to determine the relationship between racial identity and sexual violence among LGBTQ prisoners. Additionally, the study aimed to explore how LGBTQ prisoners experience this violence and if racial identity is associated with different experiences. The current study adds to the paucity of research in this area and provides a stronger basis for more attention and care to the treatment of LGBTQ prisoners. It may also be used to inform policy to protect this at-risk population and inform the way social workers are educated and practice with LGBTQ adults. The following chapter will present the methodology of the study.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate if there is a relationship between race and experiences of sexual violence among LGBTQ prisoners and to explore these experiences. The study aimed to determine risk of different racial identities to experiences of sexual violence from staff and other prisoners within the LGBTQ prison population. Additionally, it aimed to establish common themes of these experiences among LGBTQ prisoners. The study used data from a national LGBTQ prisoner survey that was conducted in 2014 (Lydon et al., 2015). The following section describes the initial study, followed by the complete methodology of the secondary data analysis.

#### **Initial Study Design**

The initial survey used in the current study was distributed by Black and Pink, an organization that focuses on advocacy and services for LGBTQ prisoners, which publishes a newspaper that is currently sent out to over 10,000 prisoners around the country, up to 10 times each year. All of the prisoners who are part of Black and Pink and receive the newspaper identify as LGBTQ, and they are understood to be open about this identity in prison. The survey is the largest known survey of prisoners who identify as LGBTQ. Prisoners were asked both quantitative and qualitative questions regarding their identities and experiences, including demographics, solitary confinement, discrimination and violence, healthcare, relationships and community, and programs during incarceration.

In 2013, prior to sending out the survey, Black and Pink made an announcement about the survey in an issue, sent to 3,700 prisoners, asking, “Share one or two questions you would like to see on the survey. How could a survey like this be useful to you? Who should we share a final report with?” (Lydon et al., 2015). Black and Pink received over 30 responses, including one person who sent an extensive list of questions, which was used as a template for the final survey. Volunteers read previous reports and survey projects created by similar organizations, and the final survey consisted of 133 questions (Lydon et al., 2015). The survey mostly consisted of nominal data with some open-ended questions and dichotomies.

One limitation of the original survey was the fact that not every respondent answered every question, so the number of responses varied largely from question to question. Another limitation was that the newspaper was only sent to those who are open about their LGBTQ identity in prison. Since receiving the newspaper could “out” respondents, it may be assumed that the responses may not include those who still identify as LGBTQ in secrecy; these experiences are also valuable. Despite its limitations, the significance of the survey, and the experiences of its respondents, is invaluable. It is the sole collection of data of this magnitude on the LGBTQ prisoner population.

**Ethical considerations.** Since 2010, Black and Pink has distributed their newspaper to prisons across the country to its members. Often through word-of-mouth, prisoners hear about Black and Pink’s newspaper and organization and send a letter requesting to be signed up for the newspaper. When this request is received, Black and Pink adds prisoners to the mailing list. Prisons screen and read all incoming mail and make a decision of whether to deliver it to the prisoner or reject it. Prisons also screen and read outgoing mail and make a decision to deliver it out or return it to the prisoner. It is assumed that the prisons holding the prisoners authorized this

correspondence, as they allowed for the survey and response mail to be delivered both ways through the U.S. postal service. No consent form was used as the survey was sent and responded to consensually. An IRB review did not take place because Black and Pink was not conducting empirical research; they sent a survey to prisoners to respond to questions about themselves. Upon receiving responses, volunteers entered the data and de-identified the data though assigned anonymous numbers to all participants.

It is vital to note that while Black and Pink's survey was conducted ethically through the consensual sharing of information, some of the data is very complex and relates to severe trauma. In order to be mindful of and sensitive to this, the author finds it important to highlight that an incarcerated member of Black and Pink largely contributed to the questions of the survey, and many of the organizers of Black and Pink who compiled and sent out the survey were formerly incarcerated. In the survey, they inserted encouragements to take breaks while answering and provided warnings before sections that might lead prisoners to feel vulnerable or activated to previous trauma. Preceding the questions on discrimination and violence, the survey stated:

Sometimes even reading questions about violence can bring up things inside your mind. These thoughts can make you sad, angry, feel like you are back in the situation when harm happened. Remember to take breaks if you need them. Remember that you are not alone. One of the reasons we ask these questions is to show that violence against LGBTQ prisoners is far too common. Know that you are cared for and not forgotten. (Lydon et al., 2015)

After sending their responses, participants were sent a certificate, resource guide and entered into a raffle in which 25 winners would receive \$25 in credit to the commissary (Lydon et al., 2015).



**Subjects (sample) and data collection.** Convenience sampling techniques were used in the original study. In September and November of 2014, the survey was mailed with two newspaper issues to 7,000 incarcerated members of Black and Pink, and the organization received and recorded 1,093 responses. It is understood that all members and, therefore, all respondents identified as LGBTQ. Participants responded from 41 states, ranged from ages 19-71 ( $M = 38$ ), and the majority of them identified as queer/bi cis-men (44%). Twenty-one percent identified as gay cis-men, 15% identified as trans women, and others identified as two-spirit, non-binary gender, and lesbian or queer/bi cis-women (Lydon et al., 2015). Volunteers completed data entry and de-identified data using random ID numbers entered into an Excel spreadsheet.

### **Current Study Design**

The survey questions, the published report of the survey, and existing research were examined to determine a lack of published research on sexual violence and race within the LGBTQ prisoner population. The current study examined experiences of sexual violence within the context of racial identity using both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitatively, the study investigated what relationship, if any, exists between racial identity and experiences of sexual violence. Qualitatively, the study explored themes that arose in prisoner's descriptions of their experiences of sexual violence regarding *how* they experienced sexual violence and *what* differences, if any, existed between racial groups.

As a secondary data analysis, the present study's design was dependent on the design of the initial survey. Secondary data analysis holds many benefits and drawbacks. Among the benefits included is the ability to access data without the collection process. Particularly, the secondary data allowed the researcher to access data of a vulnerable population, which likely

would not have been feasible if pursued on the researcher's own accord. The use of secondary data enabled the current study to investigate both quantitative and qualitative data on the largest number of LGBTQ prisoners collected thus far. The survey provides in-depth, valuable data about a population that has never been examined in the current academic literature. As discussed in research design literature, while saving time and resources to not collect the data oneself is beneficial, not being involved with the original research design and data collection is also a limitation (Engel & Schutt, 2013). For example, the current researcher had to formulate and modify research questions based on the analytic possibilities of the data, which relates to what questions were asked, how questions may have been worded, or how the quantitative answers were formatted (Engel & Schutt, 2013).

Mixed methods studies have become a widely accepted research design in the field of social work but also present a challenge in that they require increased effort to coordinate research questions and data to support one another in an organized fashion (Padgett, 2009). In the current secondary data analysis, a convergent parallel design was used, where the qualitative and quantitative data was collected and interpreted at the same time (Engel & Schutt, 2013). This research design is quite common and used in published social work research regularly (i.e. Henwood, Katz, & Gilmer, 2015; Townsend, Floersch, & Findling, 2010; Yoon, 2009). This design enables the findings to be integrated and interpreted together, which can provide many benefits and nuances that one may not find in a single method study. This research design also allows for qualitative data to explain or give further insight to the quantitative findings, and/or demonstrate distinctions or additional themes that quantitative data would not be capable of showing through its analysis solely (Engel & Schutt, 2013). Quantitative data provides a valuable venue to illustrate a finding concretely through fixed data and statistical analysis, and it

may be generalizable. In mixed methods research, qualitative data provides a way to elaborate on quantitative findings, consider context, and make meaning of what is being studied (Engel & Schutt, 2013).

Specifically in the current study, mixed methods secondary data analysis is used to answer questions about the experience of sexual violence during incarceration in the context of racial identity, on both a macro and micro level. Quantitative data on participants' racial identities, including experiences of sexual violence from prison staff and other prisoners, were used to answer the following question: "What is the relationship between racial identity and sexual violence among prisoners in the Black and Pink study?" Qualitative data regarding the details of experiences of sexual violence from prison staff and other prisoners in conjunction with participants' racial identities were used to explore themes of how LGBTQ prisoners in the study experienced the sexual violence and how racial groups vary in their experiences of sexual violence in prison.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher of the current study was not part of the data entry process or de-identifying process in the original study. The Founder and National Director of Black and Pink authorized the use of the data for the current study for a donation to the organization (see Appendix A for permissions). Because the current study utilized secondary data and did not collect original data from human subjects, the current study requested to be exempt from the Smith College School for Social Work (SSW) Human Subjects Review (HSR) committee review. The SSW HSR of Smith College approved the current study to use secondary data with exemption from a committee review (see Appendix B for waiver approval letter).

As the author of the current study does not identify as formerly incarcerated, the researcher acknowledges the privilege of being able to utilize the data from the survey. In order to compensate the hard work of prisoners and organizers alike who contributed to the survey, a \$50 donation was made to the organization for use of the data.

In regards to ethics and qualitative data analysis specifically, the reflexivity of the author must be reflected upon and discussed. A researcher's social background and worldviews are important to examine when considering the subjectivity of qualitative data analysis (Engel & Schutt, 2013; Padgett, 2008). It is imperative to address how the study may affect the researcher and how the researcher's subjectivity may affect the study (Padgett, 2008). The values and identities of the researcher inevitably impact the way the researcher interpreted the data, and this will be discussed further in Chapter V. The researcher identifies as a white queer woman with a strong commitment to social justice, anti-racism, and queer liberation. These identities undoubtedly affected how the qualitative data was analyzed for themes. The personal views and hopes of the researcher for this study to benefit LGBTQ prisoners are biases that may have impacted the way the data was analyzed as well. Lastly, the researcher has done organizing work with Black and Pink, and this is a relationship that should be noted when considering the author's subjectivity. While the social location of the researcher may affect the interpretation of the qualitative data, the author was intentional in using quantitative methods as well, in order to demonstrate objectivity.

### **Data Variables**

The current study only used a subsection of the data, namely a demographic question (racial identity) and questions pertaining to experiences of violence. The question asking the respondents' race contained 11 categories: Black/African American/Afro-Caribbean,

Latin@/Hispanic, White (non-Hispanic), East Asian, South Asian, American Indian/Indigenous/First Nations/Native American, Mixed Race, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Inuit/Native Alaskan, and left a blank space for “other.” In order to consolidate the race categories, Black and Pink’s analytic team consolidated answers through grouping some together, and the current study made a decision to use one of their final variables of seven categories: White, Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Native American, Other, Mixed, and those who left the question blank. Responses of East Asian, South Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Inuit/Native Alaskan were categorized as Other. Responses where two races were selected and one of them was White were categorized as the non-white race they selected. This was done in order to encompass the fact that if someone is Mixed-race and one of their races is white, they are often still treated as a person of color. Responses with more than one of the final categories were categorized as Mixed. These categories of the racial identity variable were used in analyses. Those who left their race blank were not included in quantitative or qualitative analyses.

Four quantitative questions were analyzed regarding sexual violence, and these questions were answered with dichotomous answers of yes and no. The questions were:

- 1) “Have you ever had unwanted touching by a prison staff person?”
- 2) “Have you ever been sexually assaulted or raped by a prison staff person?”
- 3) “Have you ever had unwanted touching by another prisoner?”
- 4) “Have you ever been sexually assaulted or raped by another prisoner?”

The two qualitative questions analyzed were: “Would you be willing to share any details of your experience(s) of unwanted touching or sexual assault by a prison staff person?” and “Would you be willing to share any details of your experience(s) of unwanted touching or sexual

assault by another prisoner?” These questions were followed by, “If yes, please describe (feel free to use another page if you are sending this in an envelope).”

## **Data Analyses**

**Quantitative analysis.** The quantitative data analyses were completed with the assistance of Marjorie Postal, a research analyst of Smith College SSW. The data was first analyzed using a Chi-square test, a statistical test that measures for significant differences between nominal group data. Chi-square tests were run examining all racial groups for each of the quantitative variables. Based on results from the Chi-square tests, the variables that showed significant relationships to race were analyzed further using regressions. Logistical regressions were used to correlate and determine risk of racial identities to experiences of sexual violence from prison staff and other prisoners. This regression model tested each racial identity in order to predict probability of experiencing sexual violence compared to the largest racial group, White.

These statistical methods have been determined the most efficient and effective way to determine the likelihood of racial groups experiencing sexual violence (Postal, Drisko, Corbin, & Whalen, 2014; Steinburg, 2015; Weinbach & Grinnell, 2010). Limitations include a lack of flexibility with which quantitative statistic tests were available, due to the fact that the variable of race is nominal. Based on current available literature, expected results would indicate that Black participants were less likely to experience sexual violence, and Mixed-race and White participants were more likely to experience sexual violence from both prison staff and other prisoners (Beck et al., 2014; Cunningham et al., 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Wolff et al., 2008; Wooldredge, & Steiner, 2012). These analyses offered additional insight into the data than the initial published report by Black and Pink.

**Qualitative analysis.** Thematic content analysis was used to explore common experiences of sexual violence among LGBTQ prisoners. The qualitative data analyses were completed with the assistance of ATLAS.ti, a software program that organizes the data, facilitates coding, and stores comments about the codes, enabling themes to become apparent. The qualitative data originally was grouped into seven categories based on the race of the participants, and codes were refined and grouped together throughout the process. Themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data in order to establish differences in experiences of sexual violence by racial identity. Codes for experiences from prison staff and other prisoners were distinguished to examine differences between these as well.

### **Reliability, Validity, Rigor, and Trustworthiness**

**Reliability and validity.** Although the researcher had no control of the initial survey, the reliability and validity of the quantitative data and its analysis are ensured because of the clarity of questions asked.

**Rigor and trustworthiness.** In order to conduct rigorous qualitative analysis, an advisor, Dr. Susanne Bennett, continuously reviewed the researcher's work, thematic analysis, and process. This advisory supervision assured that the researcher was coding and interpreting in a credible and sincere manner (Lietz, Lander, & Furman, 2006). The researcher contracted trustworthiness through analyzing all pieces of qualitative data and not omitting any responses, encompassing the diversity and variety of data. Further, the researcher utilized the advisory relationship in order to debrief, discuss reflexivity, biases, and expectations that could affect the trustworthiness of analysis (Lietz et al., 2006; Padgett, 2008). These steps worked to ensure that findings accurately represented the meaning intended by the participants ethically and justly.

## **Conclusion**

This mixed-methods secondary data analysis used data from a survey collected in 2014 from 1,093 LGBTQ prisoners. The study analyzed quantitative data using the Chi-square test and logistical regressions to investigate the relationship between racial identity and experiences of sexual violence while incarcerated. Qualitative data regarding these experiences of sexual violence were thematically analyzed in order to explore how prisoners experienced sexual violence while incarcerated and if variations in these experiences exist between prisoners of different racial identities. The subsequent chapter will discuss the findings of the study.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Findings**

This chapter presents an overview of the results that were found within the quantitative and qualitative data analyses. Findings resulting from the quantitative data, to determine a relationship between racial identity and sexual violence among prisoners in the original study, will be summarized. Results and themes from the qualitative data analyses will also be reviewed, in order to illustrate how prisoners experienced the sexual violence. The relationship between the quantitative and qualitative findings will be discussed.

The mean age of respondents was 38.4 years old ( $SD = 10.34$ ,  $N = 1076$ ), ranging from 19 to 71 years old. The survey received responses from 41 states. The most common gender and sexuality of the respondents were cis-men who were bi or queer (44%), followed by cis-men who were gay (21%), and trans women (15%). Extensive demographic information of the original survey respondents was included in the original report (Lydon et al., 2015). The number of responses to quantitative and qualitative questions by race is illustrated in Table 1. Notably, the largest group of respondents was White, while Other race respondents were the smallest.

Table 1

*Amount of Responses, by Race*

Race	Quantitative Responses		Qualitative Responses	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Black	281	25.1	114	10.2
Latinx/Hispanic	117	10.5	55	4.9
Mixed	144	12.9	73	6.5
Native American	69	6.2	37	3.3
Other	17	1.5	8	0.7
White	465	41.6	236	21.1
Total	1093	97.8 <sup>a</sup>	523	46.7

*Note.* % = percent of total sample

<sup>a</sup>25 responses, or 2.2% of quantitative respondents, left their race blank; this data was not included in analysis.

## Quantitative Findings

Four quantitative questions were examined, which asked respondents if they had experienced unwanted touching from prison staff, sexual assault from prison staff, unwanted touching from other prisoners, and sexual assault from other prisoners. How many prisoners of each racial group answered the quantitative questions, how many answered yes, and the percentages of those who said yes are displayed in Table 2.

**Chi-square.** This study aimed to answer quantitatively, *what is the relationship between racial identity and sexual violence among prisoners in the Black and Pink study?* Chi-square tests were run for quantitative variables by each racial group in order to measure for significant differences between the groups. Chi-square tests were run to determine if there were differences in unwanted touching and sexual assault by prison staff by race. Results showed that no significant difference was found. A Chi-square test was run to determine if there was a difference in unwanted touching by other prisoners by race. Smaller percentages of Black prisoners (40.7%) and Other race prisoners (41.2%) reported unwanted touching, compared to other racial groups.

Table 2

*Quantitative Responses, by Race*

	Prison Staff				Other Prisoners							
	Unwanted Touching		Sexual Assault		Unwanted Touching		Sexual Assault					
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%				
Race	<i>n</i>	Yes	Yes	<i>n</i>	Yes	Yes	<i>n</i>	Yes	Yes			
Black	272	102	37.5	274	36	13.1	273	111	40.7	271	55	20.3
Latinx/Hispanic	117	37	31.6	116	9	7.8	116	56	48.3	116	33	28.4
Mixed	141	65	46.1	140	21	15.0	141	68	48.2	140	37	26.4
Native American	69	29	42.0	68	7	10.3	68	38	55.9	67	23	34.3
Other	17	6	35.3	17	0	0.0	17	7	41.2	17	2	11.8
White	460	161	35.0	462	50	10.8	460	274	59.6	457	179	39.2
Total	1076	400	37.2	1077	123	11.4	1075	554	51.5	1068	329	30.8

Note. *n* = how many prisoners of each racial group answered the quantitative questions, *n* Yes = how many respondents answered yes to the question, % Yes = the percentage of the racial group's *n* who answered yes.

The highest percentages of reported unwanted touching by prisoners were reported by Native American prisoners (55.9%) and White prisoners (59.6%). The Chi-square test result indicated that these differences in percentages are statistically significant,  $\chi^2 (5, N = 1075) = 27.16, p = .00$ ). A Chi-square test was run to determine if there was a difference in sexual assault by other prisoners by race. Smaller percentages of Black prisoners (20.3%) and Other race prisoners (11.8%) reported sexual assault by prisoners than other racial groups. The highest percentages of reported sexual assault by prisoners were reported by Native American prisoners (34.3%) and White prisoners (39.2%). The Chi-square test result indicated that these differences in percentages are statistically significant,  $\chi^2 (5, N = 1068) = 33.81, p = .00$ ).

**Logistical regression.** In order to further test the probability of racial groups experiencing sexual violence, the questions that showed significant Chi-square results (unwanted touching and sexual assault by other prisoners) were tested using a logistical regression model. The model used the largest racial group, White, as a constant to compare to other groups, in order to determine if a significant difference was present. The model found a significant relationship between race and experiencing unwanted touching from other prisoners. Three racial groups were significantly different from the constant (White). These included Black, Latinx/Hispanic, and Mixed race prisoners. Each of these groups had a lower likelihood of experiencing unwanted touching from another prisoner than the White group, due to the  $\text{Exp}(\beta)$  values. There were no significant differences found for Native American or Other race prisoners. Overall, the model was significant; it explains some of the variation in the variable (Chi-square = 27.3,  $p = .000$ ). However, the  $R^2$  value (Cox & Snell  $R^2 = .025$ ) indicated that only 2.5% of the variation in the question was explained by the prisoner's race. The model also found a significant relationship between race and experiencing sexual assault from other prisoners. Four racial

groups were significantly different from the constant (White). These were Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Mixed, and Other race prisoners. Each of these groups had a lower likelihood of experiencing sexual assault from another prisoner than the White group, due to the  $\text{Exp}(\beta)$  value. There was no significant difference found for Native American prisoners. Overall, the model was significant; it explains some of the variation in the variable (Chi-square = 35.0,  $p = .000$ ). Again, the  $R^2$  value was low (Cox & Snell  $R^2 = .032$ ) and indicated that only 3.2% of the variation in the question was explained by the prisoner's race. The results of the logistical regression, including the  $\text{Exp}(\beta)$  values and significance levels are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

*Logistical Regression Model Used in Order to Predict Sexual Violence from Other Prisoners, by Race*

Race	Unwanted Touching		Sexual Assault	
	$\text{Exp}(\beta)$	sig.	$\text{Exp}(\beta)$	sig.
Black	<b>0.465</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>0.395</b>	<b>.000</b>
Latinx/Hispanic	<b>0.634</b>	<b>.029</b>	<b>0.617</b>	<b>.034</b>
Mixed	<b>0.632</b>	<b>.018</b>	<b>0.558</b>	<b>.006</b>
Native American	0.860	.564	0.812	.448
Other	0.475	.138	<b>0.207</b>	<b>.038</b>
White	1.473	.000	0.644	.000

*Note.* sig. =  $p$  value. Groups that were found to have statistically significant difference to the model's constant (White) are shown in boldface.

## Qualitative Findings

**Demographic information and coding process.** The qualitative portion of this study aimed to answer the question, *how do prisoners in this study experience sexual violence?* The two qualitative questions asked respondents to provide details of (1) the unwanted touching or sexual assault from prison staff and (2) the unwanted touching or sexual assault from other prisoners. A total of 523 respondents (46.7%) answered the qualitative questions, with a total of

767 responses. Table 4 illustrates the breakdown of how many respondents from each race answered which qualitative questions. The largest racial group to respond to the qualitative questions was White ( $n = 236$ ), followed by Black respondents ( $n = 114$ ), Mixed race respondents ( $n = 73$ ), Latinx/Hispanic respondents ( $n = 55$ ), Native American respondents ( $n = 37$ ), and Other race respondents ( $n = 8$ ). Notably, it is shown that near or over half of each racial group answered the qualitative questions, with the exception of Black respondents, with about 40% of their total group answering the qualitative questions. In addition, more prisoners answered the question about other prisoners than did those who answered about prison staff.

Table 4

*Qualitative Responses, by Race*

Race	Prison Staff		Other Prisoners		Answered Either or Both	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	% of Racial Group
Black	86	24.4	85	20.5	114	40.6
Latinx/Hispanic	36	10.2	45	10.9	55	47.0
Mixed	55	15.6	49	11.8	73	50.7
Native American	21	5.9	31	7.5	37	53.6
Other	6	1.7	8	1.9	8	47.1
White	149	42.2	196	47.3	236	50.8
Total	353	100	414	99.9	523	

*Note.* % = percent of racial group within total respondents to each qualitative question; % of Racial Group = percent among total racial group who answered qualitative questions.

In order to be able to compare results by racial identity, the qualitative responses were separated by race into six documents, with each document containing answers to both qualitative questions. Different codes were created for the two qualitative questions, regarding sexual violence from prison staff and sexual violence from other prisoners. Throughout the coding process the analyst compared codes for prison staff versus other prisoner responses. Codes for the two questions were organized into their respective code groups; all codes regarding prison staff were organized together, and all codes regarding other prisoners were organized together.

The code groups included, “abuser information,” “abuser behavior,” “event aftermath,” “event context/info,” “prisoner information,” “prisoner affect,” and “type of violence.” Code groups pertaining to sexual violence from prison staff were prefixed, “PS,” and groups pertaining to other prisoners were prefixed, “OP.” In total there were 14 code groups, 100 codes created, with 990 quotations.

The qualitative results of the types of sexual violence that respondents reported were quantified by race. For sexual violence by prison staff, the data was originally coded using the codes, “unwanted touching,” “rape & oral sex,” and “anal.” Totals for responses that stated they experienced unwanted touching, and the total of responses for rape and oral sex, and anal rape, were summed by race to determine experiences of unwanted touching and sexual assault by prison staff. The totals and percentages of each racial group to experience each type of sexual violence by prison staff are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Qualitative Totals of Sexual Violence from Prison Staff, by Race*

Race	Unwanted Touching		Sexual Assault	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Black	45	52.3	22	25.6
Latinx/Hispanic	13	36.1	4	11.1
Mixed	24	43.6	13	23.6
Native American	10	47.6	5	23.8
Other	3	50.0	0	0.0
White	60	40.3	35	23.5
Total	155		78	

*Note.* *n* = total respondents who stated they experienced the type of sexual violence; % = percent of racial group to state they experienced the type of sexual violence within all qualitative responses from respective racial group.

For sexual violence by other prisoners, the data was originally coded using, “kissing,” “unwanted touching,” “masturbating,” “forced hand-to-genital,” “oral rape,” “anal rape,” “rape,” and “unspecific.” Totals for responses that stated they experienced unwanted touching and

kissing were calculated together by race to determine experience of unwanted touching by race. Totals for responses of masturbating, forced hand-to-genital, oral rape, anal rape, and rape were calculated together to determine experiences of sexual assault by race. Unspecific accounts of sexual violence were kept separately and left out of these respective totals. The totals and percentages of each racial group to experience each type of sexual violence by other prisoners are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

*Qualitative Totals of Sexual Violence from Other Prisoners, by Race*

Race	Unwanted Touching		Sexual Assault	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Black	27	31.8	25	29.4
Latinx/Hispanic	11	24.4	15	33.3
Mixed	13	26.5	14	28.6
Native American	7	22.6	19	61.3
Other	3	37.5	2	25.0
White	43	21.9	118	60.2
Total	104		193	

*Note.* *n* = total respondents who stated they experienced the type of sexual violence; % = percent of racial group to state they experienced the type of sexual violence within all qualitative responses from respective racial group.

The remainder of the qualitative results will be reviewed in sub-sections in order to inclusively illustrate the stories of the prisoners. First, the information that respondents volunteered about themselves and their abusers will be overviewed. Next, the major findings in narratives of the abuse will be presented, including what happened after the abuse. Lastly, major themes that emerged from the responses will be discussed. In each sub-section, both data sets (abuse from prison staff and abuse from other prisoners) will be included. In the discussion that follows, the words, spelling and grammar of responses are printed exactly as they were recorded, without any changes. This decision to refrain from editing data was made by the author in order



to preserve authenticity of the responses. These results and the way they are presented aim to illuminate prisoners' experiences and stories of their abuse while incarcerated. In addition, as the study aimed to explore how prisoners of different races experienced sexual violence, the quotations will include the race of the respondent.

**Who are these prisoners and their abusers?** The respondents of the questions did not mention their demographics in depth, but some of them revealed personal information that is important to note. Within the data pertaining to sexual violence by prison staff, four respondents mentioned that they had experienced suicidal thoughts, often as a result of abuse:

I was raped in 2007 by another prisoner, and placed on self-harm observation status because I was feeling suicidal. The guard assigned to observe me entered my cell after turning the security camera off and coerced me to perform oral sex on him. (R177, Native American)

Fourteen mentioned situations where abuse from prison staff affected their access to health or mental health services. A trans respondent stated, "After male guards grabbed my breasts, I stopped taking the Lupron injections to avoid this" (R98, White). Five respondents mentioned that they were 20 years old or younger when the abuse occurred, including one who was 15: "I was raped when I was 15 years old by a staff member and another inmate" (R263, White). Within data pertaining to sexual violence by other prisoners, 13 respondents also mentioned being young when experiencing abuse: "he told me that I was going to suck his dick or be beat up. I was 14" (R306, Mixed). Thirty-four respondents mentioned being discriminated against by staff or targeted by other prisoners in relation to their experience of sexual violence. Of those, one said, "no action was taken on those inmates because a woman unit manager said a man can't be raped and a homosexual can't be raped" (R220, White). A Latinx/Hispanic

respondent said, “One time a c/o was yelling at me ‘man are suppose to like woman not other man’ and punched me in my (privet parts)” (R162). In addition, some, mostly White, respondents mentioned being in relationships, “I have been with my transgender partner for over 14 yrs now and they know that we are a couple” (R239, White).

Among responses about sexual violence from prison staff, five Black prisoners were the only respondents to mention race and racial stereotypes. For example, one person said: “It only happened once but A C/O made a comment on the size of my penis saying It's true what they say about Black people” (R518, Black). In addition, two Black respondents were the only ones to mention the race of the staff person who abused them. Among responses about sexual violence from other prisoners, White respondents (12) mentioned race most often, some Latinx/Hispanic (3) and Mixed race (4) respondents did as well, and only two Black respondents mentioned race. The majority of quotes casually include the abuser’s race, “I was raped by a black prisoner” (R256, White).

Among responses about sexual violence from prison staff, 18 respondents stated that a high-ranking staff person was involved in the sexual assault, including sergeants, lieutenants, and captains. Respondent 515’s (Mixed) experience illustrates a common theme of high-ranking officers committing the sexual violence, and then protecting other prison staff from punishment for it: “The captain came with a can of pepper spray and he unlocked my door. He told me to get on my knees and suck his dick or he would spray me. When I told the warden he laughed.”

In addition, 11 respondents experienced sexual violence from mental health or medical providers employed in the prison, “I also had a mental health doctor touch me and try to assault me saying ‘who will they believe, me or you?’” (R123, Native American). Further, six respondents mentioned sexual violence from other specific staff like mailroom or religious staff.

A few respondents mentioned the sexual orientation of the prison staff: “Officer was also gay and wanted to arouse me” (R8, White).

Responses about sexual violence from other prisoners frequently (49 responses) mentioned that their abuser was a cellmate, “My first cellie raped me the first night I got in” (R395, Mixed). Twelve responses mentioned that their abuse was gang-related or committed by someone in a gang, “set up by gang members who have been watching and waiting for a time to attack me” (R65, Black).

**What is their story of abuse?** Among responses about sexual violence from prison staff, 92 respondents (26.1%) mentioned that this was not a single occurrence, “I have been sexually assaulted 4 times by 4 corrections officers” (R5, Black). Twenty-one respondents were threatened into agreeing to the violence or to not report it afterwards: “Three officers have told me they’ll get another inmate to stab me if I don’t give them oral sex” (R173, Mixed). Fifteen respondents felt they were singled out, or targeted specifically by a staff person: “a c/o always stopped me leaving chow hall (every day) and fondled me” (R218, White). Additionally, 23 mentioned that the staff made comments about their bodies or their sexual desire: “...started fondling it and saying how much he liked it an how soft it was” (R359, Black). As many as 35 of the responses stated that there was more than one staff person involved; this included staff members enabling other staff members and groups of staff members committing sexual assault. Respondent 507 (Black) recounts, “...held down by 2 guards while a third guard inserted his fingers into my anus and stroked me, then punched kicked and sprayed with mace.”

Many respondents mentioned painful physical assault that accompanied the sexual violence, such as: “I was raped probed by a baton in my ass my balls hit by the baton and choked...” (R264, White). Some prisoners spoke about prison staff giving them something like

protection or goods in exchange for sexual favors: “A CO gave me drugs for sex” (R109, Mixed) and “He promised to protect me, and gave me food and tobacco products” (R177, Native American). In the stories of prisoners who were sexually abused by prison staff, it was seen that often it is something prisoners experience more than once, and events can commonly include a prisoner being threatened, singled out, verbally harassed, beaten, and abused by multiple staff people at once.

Of all 353 responses, 155 or 44% stated they experienced unwanted touching, or hand-to-genital assault from prison staff. Eighteen respondents or 5% mentioned that they were sodomized in some way. Sixty-one respondents or 17% shared about being sexually assaulted by rape or forced oral sex.

After experiencing sexual violence from prison staff, 15 spoke about trying to report it and being unsuccessful, and over 20 reported being punished for the violence or report in some way. “A female community corrections officer used her position to illicit sex from me and then punished me after I stopped cooperating and the plea investigator didn't believe me” (R484, White). Another said:

I filed my grievance and this and them putting cat pellets in my food but was told that the officers denied all allegations therefore nothing will be done. Since then I've been targeted and had my property, radio, shops, family photos, books, transcripts, commissary, foods, hygiene, etc. destroyed. (R1, Mixed)

Over 10 respondents, 9 of which were White, were successful when they objected to the violence or reported the violence. One said, “I immediately turned around and confronted the officer threatening him with physical violence. He backed off and left me alone” (R101, White).

Some prisoners (approximately 30) who shared about their experiences of sexual violence from prison staff expressed emotion about it. In contrast, the majority of them expressed feeling degraded in some way, “This subject I try to forget it makes me feel unwanted, used and abused, hopeless and useless. Degraded” (R215, White); and, “It is humiliating, emotionally painful and just plain wrong” (R497, Latinx/Hispanic). Notably, over 20 did not give any details of their abuse, only affirming the question that it had happened, but nothing more. “I had many” (R428, Native American) and “Its just too traumatic to talk about” (R67, White) are responses that illustrate a lack of emotion and details while affirming that the experience did occur. The stories of prisoners who were abused by prison staff involved a power dynamic where a prisoner was by default inferior to their abuser. Some of the prisoners expressed feelings about it, but most did not.

In regards to responses about sexual violence from other prisoners, prisoners generally volunteered more information than the data about prison staff. Like the responses about prison staff, many (83) respondents stated that their experiences of sexual violence were recurrent and not a single event. Some even spoke to how it is a normal part of prison life: “I’ve been sexually assaulted on several occasions...these assaults continue at some level or another it’s now like part of doing time” (R26, Black). Twenty-three respondents spoke about being endangered by staff contributing to the sexual assault, “Three times officers set me up to get raped by another inmate” (R173, Mixed). Twenty-two respondents were attacked while in the bathroom, “I was sitting on the toilet when inmate came into cell and told me to suck it, shoving it in my face. Totally vulnerable, I did” (R285, White). Seventeen spoke about being assaulted while sleeping or in bed, “Sexual touching while I was asleep” (R290, White). Forty-eight respondents spoke about being beaten, brutally most of the time, in order to overpower the prisoner, “I was beaten

unconscious and anally raped” (R496, Latinx/Hispanic). Forty-one respondents were attacked by more than one or groups of other prisoners, “I was in a single cell prison when 5 inmates came in and raped me” (R3, White). Twenty-five respondents stated there was an exchange or exchange for protection involved in the sexual violence, “I’ve been bothered by inmates force me to ride, pay for protection, exhorted me by offering commissary for sexual favors” (R202, Mixed) and “I once had a cellie that was making me do things for him to keep other gangs from hurting me” (R411, Black).

Highlighting respondent’s resiliency, 30 respondents stated that another prisoner attempted sexual violence, almost 50 stated they fought back or tried to defend themselves, and almost 30 stated that they were successful in their defense. Respondent 41 (Black) shared, “...I was raped by inmates and then pimped out by both until I fought back. Now all these years later, most people know I not only will fight, but that I CAN fight.” Respondent 275 (White) stated, “I was constantly threatened by the person and in the attempted rape I got stabbed in the hand, but I fought him off.”

Of all 414 responses related to other prisoners, 4 or 1% stated they were forced to hand-to-genital assault, 5 or 1.2% stated they experienced unwanted kissing, 12 or 2.9% stated other prisoners masturbated in front of them, 99 or 23.9% stated they experienced unwanted touching/groping from another prisoner, 41 or 9.9% stated they experienced oral rape, 27 or 6.5% stated the sexual assault was anal rape, and 109 or 26.3% stated they were raped (unspecified). Forty-two responses or 10.1% were not explicit or specific when referring to the type of sexual violence they experienced. For example, one said they were, “placed in a cell with someone who wanted some ass and wasn’t accepting any no, so he physically tormented me til I gave him some everyday” (R325, Black).

After the sexual violence occurred, some (12) mentioned that they were fearful of reporting it or staff finding out, due to retribution from the abuser or being placed in solitary confinement. Respondent 356 (White) stated, “Stayed in my cell for 1 week while I began to heal so guards would not see me. Told if I say said anything I would die.” Some (35) respondents spoke about reporting the event, but most of them (28) had unsuccessful outcomes. “Staff knew of what had happened and they chose to keep it quiet even after I tried to explain my story. The investigator laughed at me and said, ‘This is prison, know your place!!!’” (R101, White). In addition, 33 respondents experienced staff denying or not believing their report, including victim-blaming attitudes, “When I told staff I was told I should learn to fight and that I deserved it” (R474, Native American).

The narratives of the prisoners who survived these acts of sexual violence show that it is a common experience, can involve vicious physical assault, can happen in their own cell or in bathrooms, while they are endangered by staff, and can be committed by multiple other prisoners at once. Their stories show resiliency, and efforts to defend themselves and seek justice through reporting it.

Lastly, the prisoners’ responses about sexual violence from other prisoners include far more emotional expression than the responses about prison staff. Compared to about 30 for the latter responses, there were 72 quotes of emotional expression and affect among responses about sexual violence from other prisoners. These emotions included feeling alone, betrayed, degraded, depressed, emotional pain, helplessness, fear, shame, and feeling traumatized. After staff did not believe Respondent 382 (Black) and their abuser threatened to kill them, they stated, “I felt as if no one cared about me.” Respondent 38 (Black) shared, “it was the 1 most horrifying and scary experiences I have EVER experienced in my life,” in reference to being raped. Some expressed

past and current suicidal thoughts. One said, “I was beaten and raped by five men. I tried to hang myself to deal with it” (R141, White). The affects demonstrated in the responses of prisoners who experienced sexual violence from other prisoners illustrates an increased expression of emotion among this data compared to sexual violence by prison staff.

**What are the major themes that emerge from their stories?** Three major themes emerged from these stories of sexual violence. These themes focus on differences in race, differences in affect, and differences in complexity.

*Differences in race.* In regards to race, an area of interest of this study, the only major theme found was the difference in those who mentioned race and in what context. Seven Black prisoners were the only respondents to mention race, in regards to themselves or others, within the data about prison staff. Yet, within the data about other prisoners, White, Latinx/Hispanic, and Mixed race respondents most frequently mentioned race, with two Black respondents doing so. Among all other coded responses, there was generally a proportional distribution and representation of the races.

*Differences in affect.* A salient pattern that emerges from the data is how respondents shared fewer details and expressed less emotion when sharing the details about unwanted touching or sexual assault by prison staff compared to discussion of unwanted touching and sexual assault by other prisoners. For example, regarding sexual violence from other prisoners, one respondent stated, “It's degrading and it makes me feel like dirt. I cry to myself at night every night in these places” (R96, White). There were significant amounts of responses that included emotions pertaining to PTSD and depression around the sexual violence, including suicidal thoughts, feeling degraded, helpless, etc. A respondent stated:



You have no idea what it is like to feel so helpless. No way to shield yourself of the pain, each blow a new scare in the mind. It felt as if it went on forever. I thought I knew pain but that was not the half of it.... To this day since that happened, all I want to do is curl into a ball and just die. (R525, White)

Many responses regarding sexual violence from prison staff did not go into such detail of their emotional response. For example, “I used to get real tired of the pat and/or strip searches, feeling undignified and stuff” (R517, Native American). In addition, regarding sexual violence from prison staff, a White respondent (R35) said, “I was raped - sodomized by a corrections officer named Prichard... In Attica Correctional Facility.” In contrast, her response regarding other prisoners stated, “In 1994 I was raped by a Latin King gang member. I feel that things can only get worse for me now, as I have grown extremely large, ample breasts” (R35). The responses demonstrate a difference in expression; while in the first response she states only facts about the assault, and in the second she expresses fear about the future regarding other prisoners due to her trans identity.

*Differences in complexity.* Another striking theme is how the details regarding sexual violence by other prisoners involve considerable complexity, and multiple dynamics at play, compared to details regarding sexual violence by prison staff. For example, the following respondent stated:

I had older convicts touch and force me to have sex - I was scared and 18 and 19 yrs old. I started fighting back with my hands and with weapons. Then I was left alone and given respect. I joined a prison family and took care of my boyfriends after that and got paid for my sex and help. (R343, White)

I've been sexually assaulted about 5 times in 25 years. it's to the point now that i just go on and sell my body for these gang members because the prison staff wont put me in safekeeping around other homosexuals. I sell my body sometimes to make my pimp happy so i don't get beat up. (R7, Black)

In both these quotes, it can be seen that the dynamics of sexual violence between prisoners can have numerous implications related to protection and one's body. There is also ambivalence seen in regards to sexual assault, protection, survival and sexual pleasure in prison, as Respondent 130 (Black) states about her sexual assault, "I gave in and it felt good and she brought me pleasure, but I didn't report it because she had given me pleasure." The increased complexity of the prisoner's statements about the sexual violence from other prisoners appears to indicate that their relationships with other prisoners are more dynamic than with prison staff. The implications of this theme, differences in race, and increased expression of affect, among data about other prisoners will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **Conclusion**

Statistical tests were run in order to determine the risk of sexual violence from prison staff and other prisoners by race. There were no significant findings for sexual violence from prison staff in regards to race. It was found that Black, Latinx/Hispanic, and Mixed race prisoners were less likely to experience unwanted touching from another prisoner than the White group. It was found that Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Mixed, and Other race prisoners were less likely to experience sexual assault from another prisoner than the White group. These quantitative results regarding sexual violence from other prisoners were compared to the qualitative data.

Qualitative data was coded for themes in order to determine how the prisoners from the study experienced sexual violence from prison staff and other prisoners. Overall results about the

survivors, abusers, their stories, and aftermath of their abuse were reviewed. Three emerging themes were found, including differences in race, differences in affect, and differences in complexity. In looking at both quantitative and qualitative findings, there appears to be no discrepancy or disparity between the results. The qualitative findings served to support and deepen the quantitative findings. The implications of the quantitative and qualitative results will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to utilize secondary data from a national LGBTQ prisoner survey in order to quantitatively determine a relationship between racial identity and experiences of sexual violence while incarcerated. Additionally, the study sought to qualitatively explore how the prisoners of the survey experienced sexual violence.

Based on the limited but existing literature on the topic, it was hypothesized that Black prisoners would be less likely to experience sexual violence from prison staff and other prisoners. Chi-square testing found no significant differences between racial groups and sexual violence (unwanted touching or sexual assault) from prison staff, but found significant differences between racial groups and sexual violence from other prisoners. Logistical regression tests found that Black, Latinx/Hispanic, and Mixed race prisoners were less likely to experience unwanted touching from another prisoner than White prisoners. Logistical regression tests found that Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Mixed, and Other race prisoners were less likely to experience sexual assault from another prisoner than White prisoners. Qualitative data was analyzed and three themes emerged.

The following chapter will review the implications of the quantitative and qualitative findings, including strengths and limitations of the methods used in the study. Overall implications of the study for other research, theory, and social work applications will be discussed. Recommendations for future research will be stated.

## Quantitative Synthesis

The quantitative findings showed that across all racial groups, between over 30% and 46% experienced unwanted touching from prison staff, and around 40% up to almost 60% of prisoners experienced it from other prisoners. The results raise unease in regards to how LGBTQ prisoners' bodies are treated and how unsafe they may feel while incarcerated. Additionally, between almost 12% up to almost 40% of prisoners across racial groups reported sexual assault from other prisoners. Although the smallest group of Other race reported no sexual assault from prison staff, larger racial groups reported that between almost 8% up to 15% of them experienced sexual assault from prison staff. While the differences between groups will be expanded below, the percentages of LGBTQ prisoners experiencing sexual violence during incarceration are alarming.

Chi-square tests found that there were no statistically significant differences in experiences of sexual violence from prison staff by race. While there is far less research on this topic specifically, one study ( $N = 92,449$ ) found that White and Mixed race prisoners reported more sexual violence from prison staff (Beck et al., 2014). This inconsistency in findings may have occurred for multiple reasons, including the fact that the sample size for the current study was far smaller and focused on LGBTQ prisoners rather than all prisoners.

The quantitative results affirm the tested hypothesis, finding that Black prisoners were less likely to experience unwanted touching and sexual assault from other prisoners. These results are consistent with the available literature that found Black prisoners to be less likely to report sexual victimization than white prisoners (Beck et al., 2014; Cunningham et al., 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Wolff et al., 2008; Wooldredge, & Steiner, 2012). The quantitative statistical tests also found that Latinx/Hispanic and Mixed race prisoners were less likely than

White prisoners to experience unwanted touching and sexual assault from other prisoners. As mentioned earlier, the difference in results from the Beck et al. (2014) study compared to the current study may be due to the smaller sample size and focus on LGBTQ prisoners in the current study. In addition, the current study found that Other race prisoners had a lower likelihood than White prisoners of experiencing sexual assault from other prisoners. Beck et al. (2014) examined race and sexual victimization in prisons and found no significant differences for prisoners with an Other race (Other also referred to prisoners who identified as Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Native Alaskan, but also included Native American prisoners).

Some literature on race and violence in prison postulates that Black prisoners and other groups of color may target White prisoners in order to reverse the white dominance of free society inside the prison walls (Carroll, 1982; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Scacco, 1975). Further, through constant oppression and experiences of racism in society, it could be seen that Black and other prisoners of color may feel a stronger need to assert themselves and their power in a vulnerable environment. They may feel more likely to be attacked or targeted by prison staff, and in order to protect themselves, they use intimidation towards others (Human Rights Watch, 2001). The current study findings suggest that the culture of incarceration may include a neutralization of race, due to the highly controlled environment. Overall, the differences among racial groups in the quantitative results leave much room for exploration in future research. Nevertheless, the abundant prevalence of sexual violence from prison staff and other prisoners is consistent with existing reports on LGBTQ prisoners from human rights and advocacy groups (Bassichis & Spade, 2007; Davidson-Arad, 2005; Dierkhising et al., 2014; Grant et al., 2011; Reisner et al., 2014; Rosenberg & Oswin, 2015).

## Qualitative Synthesis

The qualitative dataset was sizeable, and common results regarding information about the prisoners and their abusers, and what happened when they were abused and after the event(s), were reviewed in the previous chapter. Notable content and themes and their implications will be overviewed in this section.

**Content.** When writing about the details of their trauma, the prisoners sometimes included information about themselves. Significantly, some wrote about suicidal thoughts and their mental health. As previously mentioned, a quote revealed how a suicidal prisoner on observation status was orally raped by the guard watching the prisoner. This example demonstrates a cyclical system of sexual violence and decline in mental health. In addition, there were multiple cases where abuse from prison staff impacted prisoners' access to health or mental health services, further illustrating an environment where LGBTQ prisoners may need help but feel unable to seek it. Further, reports of staff discrimination when prisoners reported sexual violence magnify this unsafe environment. When speaking about sexual violence from staff and other prisoners, respondents spoke about being very young when the abuse occurred or started to occur. Trauma theory would suggest that experiencing this abuse at a young age would have lasting effects into adulthood and could very well impede the success of the prisoners once they were released from incarceration (Basham, 2011).

In regards to their abusers, many prisoners spoke about how high-ranking staff became involved in the sexual violence itself and protected the staff who committed the abuse. This finding is especially concerning, because it is overwhelmingly problematic for the safety of LGBTQ prisoners. It was found that respondents experienced sexual violence from mental health or medical providers employed in the prison, as well. This finding is horrific given the amount of

trauma and abuse prisoners already receive within the prison walls. Often, prisoners reported experiencing sexual violence from their cellmate and at times from gang-related prisoners, which brings up further questions about the safety of prisons and how they ensure that prisoners are safe, especially at night in their cells.

Many prisoners provided details of their story of abuse. When writing about abuse from staff, prisoners reported the abuse occurring more than once, with some being overtly threatened to comply or not report the abuse, and many reporting that more than one staff person was involved. In addition, many tried to report it and were unsuccessful (often due to staff not believing them), and many were punished for the sexual violence or report in some way. These results are particularly salient and disturbing, because they demonstrate the systemic abuse from prison staff that occurs to LGBTQ prisoners.

When writing about abuse from other prisoners, many prisoners also reported that the abuse was frequent or had occurred more than once. An unsettling finding was that prisoners reported being endangered by staff prior to the sexual violence. Respondents reported being abused while in the bathroom, while they were in bed or sleeping, being brutally beaten during the sexual violence, and being attacked by more than one person or groups of prisoners. Some prisoners reported the sexual violence to staff, but most had unsuccessful outcomes, including staff discriminating against them, simply not believing them, or using victim-blaming language. Again, these findings raise increased unease about staff behaviors and the safety of LGBTQ prisoners.

**Themes.** Three themes arose from the qualitative analysis. The only substantial difference regarding race was that Black respondents were the only ones to mention race when writing about abuse from prison staff; and White, Latinx/Hispanic, and Mixed race respondents



mentioned race most often when writing about abuse from other prisoners. These results indicate that race of another prisoner committing sexual violence may be more salient for White prisoners and less so for Black prisoners. The findings also suggest that for Black prisoners, race is more relevant in the experience of sexual violence from prison staff. This could perhaps be due to the power dynamic of race being compounded by the power dynamic of prisoner and staff.

Other themes that emerged from the data were differences in complexity and affect when respondents wrote about sexual violence. Namely, there was an increase in complexity and affect when writing about abuse from other prisoners, compared to writing about abuse from staff. The stories of prisoners who were abused by prison staff involved a power dynamic where prisoners were by default inferior to their abusers. Some of the prisoners expressed feelings about it, but most did not. The prisoners' responses about sexual violence from other prisoners included far more emotional expression than the responses about prison staff. Some of these emotions and their affects referred to symptoms of PTSD, indicating an increased need for mental health attention for prisoners. In addition, there was clearly more complexity with the sexual violence among prisoners, including multiple dynamics, relationships, and effects afterwards. These differences may be due to the fact that prisoners form relationships with one another, and prisoners have far more interaction with one another than they do with staff. Therefore, sexual violence among prisoners may be far more complex and involve multiple dynamics and implications for the survivor and abuser. In addition, there may be more emotion attached to these events, as the prisoners have deeper relationships with other prisoners than with staff. In contrast, sexual violence between staff persons and prisoners is primarily an abuse of power by the staff person, over the prisoner. The relationships between staff and prisoners are likely simple and static, where power is palpable and emotion is not involved.

**Reflexivity.** The researcher's social location, how the data affected her, and how she interpreted the results are vital to acknowledge (Engel & Schutt, 2013; Padgett, 2008). As a social worker, the researcher has worked with clients who have experienced sexual abuse and trauma. While this professional background provided helpful experience for reading and analyzing the qualitative data, the data was nonetheless extremely difficult to read and process at times. The researcher's identities as a social worker and as a woman inevitably impacted the way she understood the prisoners' words. In order to continuously reflect on this and be aware of one's positionality, the researcher benefited from time in advising sessions to process reactions and discuss with her advisor about how and why she was interpreting the data. In addition, when the researcher felt a strong reaction, she wrote a memo about it in her coding program. For example, after reading one extremely disconcerting, explicit quote, the researcher wrote:

When I got to this quote I started feeling sick to my stomach, light-headed and dizzy ... I had to stop ... I felt disgusted, horrified, violated. I stopped coding for the night ... I feel myself get more triggered and bothered from explicit descriptions of sexual violence ... The abuse of power by staff is sickening, and it's horrifying to think of all the other staff (not just COs, but lawyers, medical professionals, spiritual staff) who also abuse these prisoners. It's horribly disempowering to read. It also makes me very upset to think about the stigma that prisoners live through from society, and how some people wouldn't be bothered if they knew prisoners were subjected to this abuse.

Being able to reflect on one's reaction and internal thought process allowed the researcher to return to the coding work with a clear mind. In other places, the researcher would simply remark something such as, "So horrifying, this quote is so, so bothersome to me. I feel sick." The researcher posits that the strong reaction to these quotes speaks to how sickening and

tragic the violence is. While shocking and perturbing for one to only read the accounts, it can be seen that the lives of these prisoners are likely very traumatic and terrifying.

### **Limitations and Strengths**

Limitations of the current study include many that apply to secondary data research methods in general. The inability to design and implement the survey left little flexibility for the current study. For example, the current researcher would have been interested to know if respondents had experienced trauma prior to incarceration, but this was not a question included in the original survey. In addition, using Black and Pink's data set, which was already organized by their team, caused the current study to have some limitations around what data would be easier or more difficult to analyze and understand statistically. For example, the current study could not cross-reference racial identity and gender identity; the way the data was formatted and the statistics used made cross-referencing unrealistic and too complicated to carry out. Other limitations include the fact that many prisoners expressed worry or fear about sharing details of their sexual violence in the mail survey, so some respondents did not answer the qualitative questions for that reason. Additionally, a limitation of the qualitative questions may be that they were broad and unspecific. Finally, the majority of the respondents were white, cis-men; ideally there would have been a more even distribution among racial and gender identities. The higher percentage of white respondents who answered the survey was not representative of the prison population in general.

The main strength of this study is that it is currently the largest sample of surveyed LGBTQ prisoners in the U.S., and the survey reached a reasonably wide range of participants across the country. As well, the researcher was able to access and analyze a large dataset that would not have been possible to collect independently. In addition, the survey itself included

many specific questions and some open-ended questions, which enabled the current study to examine the topics at interest using mixed-methods. While the open-ended questions were somewhat broad, and many answers were brief, the relatively small amount of qualitative data enabled the current study to analyze over 700 responses. In addition, these open-ended questions provided rich insight into how sexual violence was experienced for the respondents. The qualitative data was able to provide further support to the quantitative data. Lastly, due to the large sample size representing prisons throughout the U.S., these findings have increased generalizability for other LGBTQ prisoners and suggest a high level of risk for sexual violence in prisons related to racial identity.

### **Implications of Overall Study**

The results of this data are significant. The current study demonstrates a clear relationship between race and sexual violence among LGBTQ prisoners in prisons. Not only is it clear that large percentages of prisoners are experiencing sexual violence from prison staff and other prisoners, the study also implies that many prisoners are experiencing symptoms of mental health issues in response to the traumas. Further, it is clear that sexual violence between prisoners is prevalent and complex, and prisoners are experiencing rape and other sexual assault from individual and multiple staff persons, including mental health professionals and high-ranking staff. The findings show a disturbingly obvious system of abuse and degradation of LGBTQ prisoners.

In regards to the theoretical framework used in this study, the findings serve to enrich and expand them. The findings suggest that the culture of incarceration and the highly controlled environment may be neutralizing to social power dynamics that are prevalent on the outside of prison. In addition, the relationships between prisoners and between prisoners and staff, and the

differences seen in these relationships, provide new insight to the power and social dynamics in prisons. The different culture of incarceration seen in this study suggests that theory about race and trauma may need to be reexamined and redefined.

**Social work.** These findings have considerable implications for clinical social work education and practice, as well as social policy. The results suggest that social workers must increase their education and training for working with currently and formerly incarcerated clients. Social work educational institutions must incorporate training for working with formerly and currently incarcerated clients. It is abundantly imperative that social workers become educated on the circumstances, risks and experiences of LGBTQ prisoners in order to provide trauma-informed care. It is also crucial that social workers that are employed in the prison system not only implement trauma-informed care, but exercise practice that serves to empower prisoners as well as address prominent mental health issues such as suicidal ideation, depression and PTSD symptoms. The study further suggests that improved social policy is needed in order to implement increased safety measures for prisoners. These policies may include increased training and education for prison staff, increased accessibility of mental health services for prisoners, new safety procedures, and accountability boards and hearings for prison staff.

**Research.** Given the historic criminalization of people of color and LGBTQ persons in America and lack of research in this field, these findings underscore the need for mental health providers and researchers alike to invest in additional research on incarceration. New research must continue to investigate the relationship between sexual violence and marginalized identities in prisons. Based on the current study, this researcher recommends that future research focus on: (1) quantitative studies examining marginalized identities including race, gender identity, sexual orientation, social class, and ability/disability and experiences of sexual violence before and

during incarceration; (2) qualitative interviews with prisoners and their experiences of trauma while incarcerated; and (3) large qualitative interviews with formerly incarcerated participants investigating life on the outside, coping mechanisms, and how prisoners are affected by the trauma of incarceration. Despite the specific focus of future research, it is evident that new research must be developed in order to continue informing social work education, practice, and social policy about incarcerated clients.

## **Conclusion**

The current study used secondary data to complete a mixed-methods study examining the intersection of racial identity and sexual violence. Quantitatively, the study found that up to 37.2% of respondents experienced sexual violence from prison staff, and up to 51.5% experienced sexual violence from other prisoners. Black, Latinx/Hispanic, and Mixed race prisoners were found to have a lower likelihood of experiencing unwanted touching from other prisoners. Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Mixed, and Other race prisoners were found to have a lower likelihood of experiencing sexual assault from other prisoners. Prisoners' narratives of abuse were analyzed and showed themes of differences in race, affect, and complexity between sexual violence from prison staff and other prisoners. The results suggest a need to reexamine and redefine current theories on race, trauma, and incarceration. In addition, it is recommended that social work educators, practitioners, and policy workers collaborate to develop increased knowledge of how incarceration, marginalized identities, and trauma interact. Both the distressing findings of the current study, and the overall paucity of research on this subject, necessitate further academic exploration by social workers.

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Appendix A  
Human Subjects Review Planning Form

**2016-2017**  
**Human Subjects Review Planning Form**  
**Smith College School for Social Work**

**Student:** Sarah Aftab

**Date:** 9/16/2016

**Advisor:** Susanne Bennett

All projects require submission of this planning form. Checking item 1 signifies the need for SSW HSR review. The subsequent items will result in a 'waiver' for SSW HSR review, based on the items selected. Please provide information as requested.

1. ☐ My project will require a Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review.
2. ☒ My project will not require an HSR Committee review because my project will not involve collection of original data from human subjects. I request a waiver from HSR review because my study will utilize '**secondary**' data, which involves previously collected data that are already published or de-identified. For the waiver, select which applies to your study from the following, and provide requested information:

\_\_\_\_ 1. If using existing publicly available data bases, please describe the data source.  
[Click here to enter text.](#)

- \_\_X\_\_ 2. If using data collected by another researcher/agency, provide the following:
- Name of person authorizing the use of data:  
Jason Lydon, Founder and National Director of Black & Pink, the organization who collected the data has authorized the use of it for this project (see email attached below). Since 2010, Black & Pink's newspaper has been sent out to prisons across the country to its members. Often through word-of-mouth, prisoners hear about Black & Pink's newspaper and organization, and send a letter requesting to be signed up for the newspaper. When this request is received, Black & Pink will add them to the mailing list. Prisons screen and read all incoming mail, and make a decision of whether to deliver it to the prisoner or reject it. Prisons also screen and read outgoing mail, and make a decision to deliver it out or return it to the prisoner. In 2014, Black & Pink's survey was sent out with their newspaper to over 7,000 prisoners, and they received over 1,000 responses. It is assumed that the prisons holding the prisoners authorized this correspondence, as they allowed for the survey and response mail to be delivered both ways through the US postal service. The data set that will be used consists of 1093 participants.

- The name and address of the agency that gave the Human Subjects Review approval: Study did not have IRB/HSR approval. Their survey was sent out with their monthly newspaper and collected demographic information; they did not conduct an empirical research study. The data is completely de-identified, and was de-identified prior to it being given to me. I was not involved in the de-identifying process.

3. ☐ My project will require a Human Subjects Review from an agency/institution other than Smith College School for Social Work. I have indicated below the name of the agency/institution and the name of the Chair of its Human Subjects Review Board.

a) Name and address of agency/institution doing the Human Subjects Review:

[Click here to enter text.](#)

b) The name of the agency/institution Human Subjects Review Board Chairperson:

[Click here to enter text.](#)

**NOTE:** For item 3, you will need to include letters documenting both the original Human Subjects Review and the authorization of your use of the data as appendices in your thesis. Similarly, you will include the authorization/information noted in 2.(b)2 above.

From: **Rev. Jason Lydon** <[jason@blackandpink.org](mailto:jason@blackandpink.org)>

Date: Thu, Sep 8, 2016 at 7:13 PM

Subject: Re: Data permission

To: Sarah Aftab <[sjaftab@smith.edu](mailto:sjaftab@smith.edu)>

Hi Sarah,

The data from the Black and Pink National LGBTQ prison survey was received through consensual sharing of information from prisoners across the United States. None of these prisoners had any in-person contact with Black and Pink volunteers or staff. All of the information was received on paper that was sent through the US Postal Service. Sarah Aftab, as a new person with access to the data, did not have any connection to the project prior to the full de-identification of all information in the data. As the National Director and founder of Black and Pink I have given permission for Sarah Aftab to utilize this data for her personal research project. She is making a token donation of \$50 for the data to be used by Black and Pink for organizational expenses related to the survey project.

Thanks,  
Jason

Appendix B  
Approval Letter from Human Subjects Review Committee



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**School for Social Work**  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

September 21, 2016

Sarah Aftab

Dear Sarah,

The Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee approves your request for exemption from SSW Human Subjects Review Committee review based on the study's use of secondary data. We wish you the best with your research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.  
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Susanne Bennett, Research Advisor